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CHILDREN of The Silent Night

By Milton Cronenberg

How the fingertips of blind and deaf children are taught to become their eyes and ears .

You are suspended in absolute darkness. There is no sound—not a whisper of the wind on trees, not the beat of bird's wings, nothing but utter silence.

Suppose this had been the case since you were five years old—would you consider life worth living?

Robert J. Smithdas, now tall, husky, and 21, can answer this question from his own experience. Stricken by spinal meningitis at the age of five, Robert lost his sight and, although he retained his ability to speak, became totally deaf by the time he was 12.

Today, he is a student at St. John's College in Brooklyn, where he stands seventeenth in a class of 328 students. All the other students have normal sight and hearing.

Deaf-blind Robert also has become an excellent wrestler, likes weight lifting and swimming, and is an omnivorous reader. He shows distinct literary ability, and has written 50 poems. Recently, he sold an article to *Vogue*—describing a vacation he took in Colorado!

"I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Perkins Institution," Robert says. "There is no other school like it in the world. Perkins made me realize I could do anything I wanted to in spite of my handicaps."

What this amazing school did for Robert Smithdas, it has also done for thousands of blind boys and girls, and scores of deaf-blind youngsters, during the past 116 years. The magic "Perkins touch" transformed them from helpless, bewildered and depressed children to self-confident, capable, and happy young men and women.

This Godfrey habit of talking about virtually anything at any time carries a definite menace to those on the other end. Should even a CBS vice-president or the sponsor himself write Godfrey a critical note, it goes on the air.

As a result, he is usually left alone. And, whenever something has to be said to him, it is channeled through the two or three employes for whom Godfrey has a deep fondness and respect.

Even they, unfortunately, can't make the unpredictable showman apologize publicly for any radio misdemeanor.

Once Lizabeth Scott, the sultry, platinum-haired movie star, guested on the Chesterfield show, and Godfrey's uninhibited comments on her feminine charms raised many an eyebrow and temper. Though the network — verbally — pinned his ears back, it was the letters from listeners that earned Godfrey's apology the following Monday.

All this, the good and the bad, added up to the factor which helped CBS sell Talent Scouts to the Lipton Tea Co. last summer. This is the most formal of Godfrey's shows. He makes a mild effort to follow a script—and when he departs from it, as always, it is with excellent and well-thought-out reason.

As for the commercials on its tea and noodle soup, Lipton took a deep breath and told Godfrey to cut lose as he pleased. "Your job is to sell," he was told. "Do it your way."

His way, which sometimes involves cutting the commercial in half (he accordingly begins in the exact middle—even middle of a sentence), would be heresy on any other show. Lipton likes it.

Godfrey's present eminence—the cold figures of the rival Hooper and Nielsen popularity ratings recently both showed Godfrey as the biggest double-threat man on anybody's network—has not changed him. "Actually," he says, "the only difference is about $300,000 a year. And after all, what's that? It's only money."

Spirits Unseen . . .

"THERE are spirits out there in the grotto," the Belgian-born priest told the Japanese general. The general, impressed by the priest's story, put up a sign in front of the grotto, ordered that anyone who passed the place was to be shot, and stationed two soldiers as guards near the shrine.

Thus it was, Father Joseph Beurns, director of the Belgian Fathers, told a group in Manila that he had two Japanese soldiers all during the war protecting the cache of altar wines, his "spirits," buried in the catacombs beneath the grotto to the Blessed Virgin at the Belgian Fathers' headquarters.

—*National Catholic Welfare Conference*

Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind is now located in Watertown, on 40 acres of beautifully wooded grounds. It is five miles from Boston. The school consists of groups of buildings in Tudor Gothic style surmounted by a tower of stately beauty rising 175 feet in the air. Although Perkins is primarily a school for the blind, it is the only school in the world which also has a fully equipped and independent Department for the Deaf-Blind.

Begun on a small scale in 1832, when young Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe brought six blind children and two teachers to his father's Boston house, Perkins Institution became world-famous when, in 1837, Dr. Howe brought his first deaf-blind pupil to the school.

Laura Bridgman, who was born on a farm near Hanover, N.H., had lost the power of speech, sight, hearing, and part of the sense of smell at the age of four. Since no deaf-blind person had ever been taught the use of language before, there was no guide—no way of reaching the child's mind. But Dr. Howe persisted.

"The first experiments," he later reported, "were made by pasting upon several common articles, such as keys, books, spoons, and the like, little paper labels on which the name of the article had been printed in raised letters.

"So keen was the sense of touch in Laura's tiny fingers that she immediately perceived that the crooked lines in the word 'key' differed as much in form from the crooked lines in the word 'spoon' as one article differed from the other.

"Later, similar labels on detached pieces of paper were put into her hands . . . observing the similarity, she showed her perception by placing the label with the word key upon the key, and the label spoon upon the spoon.

"A gentle pat of approval upon her head was reward enough, and she showed a desire to continue the exercise, though utterly unconscious of its purpose."

A new step was taken a few weeks later. Articles were placed on the table without labels. The labels were given to Laura to touch, then were placed on the articles for a moment, and then put in a little heap.

Laura followed the process carefully by feeling her teacher's hands, and soon learned to find the label for book and to place it upon the volume, the same for spoon, and so on.

Next step was to cut up the label "book" into the four letters it contained, and a similar process was carried out with other words until Laura was completely familiar with all the letters of the alphabet.

Up to this point, the girl had been unaware of what these experiments were to mean to her. Dr. Howe's

moving account of the "supreme moment in Laura Bridgman's history" is interesting.

"The poor child had sat in mute amazement, patiently imitating everything her teacher did. But now the truth began to flash upon her . . . she perceived that here was a way by which she could make up a sign of anything that was in her own mind, and show it to another mind.

"At once, her countenance lighted up with a human expression . . . I saw that the great obstacle was overcome and that . . . plain and straightforward efforts were now to be used."

When she was 23, Laura was sent home to rejoin her family. But separation from her beloved Perkins made her very ill, and when it was realized her life was in danger she was brought back. She recovered immediately, and remained at the school until her death, in 1889, at the age of 60.

Almost everyone is familiar with the life of the great Helen Keller. But few know that Laura Bridgman was indirectly responsible for Helen's coming to Perkins. When Helen's father, Captain Keller of Tuscumbia, Ala., read an account by novelist Charles Dickens of Laura's education, he contacted the Perkins Institution.

Anne Sullivan, a graduate c Perkins, was sent to the Keller home

The young teacher took a do with her which had been dressed b Laura Bridgman, who was then 5 and although the two famous wome never met—Helen Keller came t Perkins five months after Laur Bridgman died—the link betwee them is there.

After the death of its founde (Dr. Howe), the directorship c Perkins was taken over by Michae Anagnos, who had come from Greec with Dr. Howe, married the doctor' daughter, and was his right-han man in the institution for man years.

Perkins was now expanding rapid ly. Anagnos established the How Memorial Press, the first printin press for the blind in any school, an with the help of Laura Bridgman set up the world's first kindergarten for the blind.

Among the first pupils to ente the kindergarten was another deaf blind student, little Tommy Stringer Born in 1886, Tommy hac lost both sight and hearin at an early age, fron spinal meningitis. He wa homeless and an orphan and had been placed in a Pittsburgh hospital. Doc tors and nurses hardly knew what to do with him and when Helen Keller heard of the boy she urged the Perkins director t

bring Tommy to the institution.

Tommy slept by day and was wide awake at night, since he had been in the charge of a night nurse at the hospital. He couldn't walk, but crept around backwards in his crib. The Perkins teachers realized that Tommy must have bumped his head many times and figured out for himself that it hurt less to bump his heels.

"The boy has intelligence," Mr. Anagnos decided. "His adaptability shows that. We shouldn't have too much trouble teaching him."

But it turned out to be a long slow process. First the boy had to be taught to walk, to dress and undress himself, and to feed himself. Fortunately Tommy was more than willing and was always ready to cooperate, providing he was hugged and loved enough.

"The little fellow has been starving for affection," Director Anagnos told his teachers. "See that he gets enough of it now to make up for what he missed."

When Tommy took his first lesson in the alphabet, the results were disappointing. B-r-e-a-d was used to introduce him to words, and again and again the word was spelled into his hand whenever he was given a piece of bread. But the whole procedure bored the child and he showed no signs of realizing what was being done.

Remembering Dr. Howe's persistence, Tommy's teachers kept at the same lesson day after day, week after week. Finally their purpose dawned on the inward consciousness of the boy, and one eventful afternoon he spelled out the letters b-r-as he swallowed a mouthful of bread. Tommy was on his way.

The first letter he wrote when he was about seven indicates fully his affection for Perkins and the director of the institution. In his rather square, shaky printed script, he wrote:

Mr. Anagnos I love you Tom.

Later in life, Tom Springer became an expert woodworker and could identify eight different kinds of wood by sense of smell alone. Leaving Perkins in 1913, he lived with his guardian in Fulton, N.Y., manufacturing crates for fruit and vegetable farmers until his death in 1945.

During its early years, the school had to severely limit the number of deaf-blind students. But modern methods have enabled the institution to handle, in one year, as many deaf-blind children as it did during the entire first 100 years.

"It is indeed a far cry from the early methods of teaching the deaf-blind to those of the present," says Gabriel Farrell, who took over the directorship of Perkins in 1931. "Today spelling in the hands is not allowed, and all forms of sign language are taboo. From the outset the pupils are taught to articulate speech and are given every oppor-

tunity for receiving impressions of the human voice.

"These impressions are received through vibration. The method employed is for the deaf-blind child to place his thumb on the mouth to feel the vibration of the lips, and the fingers on the throat to sense the vibrations of the throat muscles.

"With the hand placed in this way, the teacher talks to the child until he learns to associate certain vibrations with acts or objects. This takes weeks and months of careful and unceasing work, but the progress that is possible is its own compensation."

Teaching such children to speak is even more difficult. They must be shown how to form lips and tongue to make fundamental sounds. It is through imitation that speech comes to normal children. The deaf-blind must be trained through vibration.

The invention of an electrical apparatus called the Phipps Unit, developed by two Concord women, has been a boon of the first magnitude to teachers of the deaf-blind at Perkins. By holding a special sensitive microphone to the ear, or clamping a piece of metal projecting from it with the teeth, sounds can be transmitted and heard by the deaf.

No one knows exactly how much of a given sound is received in this manner. But a former pupil of Perkins, Marion Rostrom, deaf-blind from the age of seven, was persuaded to "listen" through the use of the Phipps Unit and heard a recording of the national anthem. Her face lighted up and she exclaimed ecstatically: "I haven't heard that for 37 years!"

Young deaf-blind Carmela Otero is a self-reliant product of the new methods. Carmela came to Perkins when she was six, and will graduate this year at 19 with a good high-school education. Recently her mother became totally deaf, and Carmela is teaching her how to "hear" with her fingers.

So the good work goes on, but is limited by lack of room and qualified teachers. It is Mr. Farrell's ambition to see the day come when a separate large school, specially built and equipped, will be used for the "Children of the Silent Night."

BUSHVELD farmers in South Africa have invented a new way to train dogs to protect their herds against jackals.

A newborn puppy is placed with a ewe and fed by her. When big enough it is allowed out with the flock but always fed at the farm house.

Having been brought up with the sheep, the dog becomes their natural protector, and when it returns to the farm for its evening meal the sheep follow it home. —*AP*

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